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AUTHOR Hubbard, Philip
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ABSTRACT

Two methods of outlining are suggested for college-level students of English as a second language (ESL) who need the tools to master rhetorical patterns of academic written English that may be very different from those in their native languages. The two outlining techniques separate the four logically distinct tasks in the process of outlining: (1) information or idea gathering; (2) logical grouping of the information or ideas; (3) labeling the groups according to a common denominator; and (4) placing the groups and the information within them into some logical order. The techniques separate the four tasks and deal with them one at a time. The first technique, box outlining, combines a modified brainstorming technique, called a scattergram, designed to gather ideas about a topic, with the task of organizing the ideas into boxes of related ideas, which the student then orders and the teacher checks. This technique can be used to introduce rhetorical patterns as well as organize ideas. The second technique, the card outline, allows more experimentation with classifying ideas by having ideas, printed on small cards, easily arranged and rearranged until the student arrives at an appropriate organization. Both techniques allow students to learn the separate elements of outlining and the logical development of English academic and professional writing so that linking ideas becomes a simpler task. (MSE)

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ALTERNATIVE OUTLINING TECHNIQUES FOR ESL COMPOSITION

Philip Hubbard
Ohio University
Athens, Ohio

In order to compete effectively with their native speaking peers, ESL students attending college in the United States need to master the rhetorical patterns of English academic writing which may be very different from those of their native languages. In order to use these patterns appropriately in their writing, students need to be exposed to techniques that help them understand and practice the patterns. In this paper, two techniques of productive outlining, the box outline and the card outline, are presented. These techniques can be used both as pedagogical devices for introducing and practicing patterns and as pre-writing tools for organizing real compositions.

1. The Need for Prewriting Organization

ESL students preparing for academic work in a college or university in the U. S. have special needs with respect to organization in their writing. As Kaplan (1966) points out, they not only have the sentence level grammar of English to master, but also the rhetorical structure of English expository writing, which may be different in very significant ways from their native structures. In particular, the principles of unity and coherence so central to our professional and academic writing are not present, at least in the linear fashion

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Philip Hubbard, Ph.D., received his M.A. in Linguistics/TESOL and his Ph.D. in Linguistics, both from the University of California, San Diego. He has taught in ESL programs at U.C. San Diego and San Diego State and is currently a lecturer in the Linguistics Department and the Ohio Program of Intensive English at Ohio University.

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we have come to expect, in the preferred rhetorical styles of many cultures. As I pointed out in a previous article (Hubbard (1983)), the types of writing typically done by international students for their classes in the more popular fields of business, engineering, and science involve summarizing, explaining processes, giving technical definitions, describing systems, presenting cause and effect relationships, comparing and contrasting, classifying, proposing, discussing, and refuting. All of these require some form of logical development, presenting information concisely and without major digressions in chronological or spatial order or in a progression from most familiar to least familiar, least important to most important, most acceptable to least acceptable, etc. Of these developmental schemes, only chronological and spatial order appear to be universal (Kaplan (1983)). Thus, it is clear that students need to be taught (or at least systematically exposed to) these rhetorical styles just as they need to be taught the different grammatical structures of English.

There are several ways to help students master the rhetorical styles of English academic writing. Recent articles have suggested that a process approach involving multiple drafts through which the writer "discovers" the best organizational plan for a given piece of work will yield the best results for both organization and content (Zamel (1983)). While this may be true for some students, it is important to realize that often students do not have or will not give the time necessary to write the multiple drafts required to produce a good composition under this approach. It also severely restricts the number and variety of compositions a student is able to write in a quarter or semester class.

In addition to the process approach, a number of different methods have been employed to introduce the relevant rhetorical structures and give the students practice with them, such as giving direct instructions, providing models (e.g. Bander (1978)), leading students to the discovery of the structures inductively (Lawrence (1972)), reconstructive outlining (Bander (1978)), Adams and Dwyer (1982)), and most recently discourse bloc analysis (Eggington and Ricento (1983)). Each of these methods has some value, and composition teachers typically use some combination of them, rarely relying on a single method. In this paper, I propose to add the category of productive outlining to the list above, not as a replacement for but as a supplement to those methods.

Productive outlining has long been the traditional method for insuring some degree of unity and coherence within a composition for both ESL students and native speakers. It has been used primarily as a tool for composing and as a check to insure that the students know what they are going to be writing about before they actually begin a composition. The importance of such pre-writing organization for ESL students, particularly

those at the college level, was discussed at some length in Hubbard (1983). However, the weakness in the traditional outlining method is that it generally assumes outlining to be a fairly straightforward process, when in fact it is a complex interaction between four quite separable tasks. These are 1) gathering the information/ideas to put into the outline, 2) dividing the information/ideas into logicial groups, 3) labeling these groups according to some common denominator, and 4) placing the groups and the information within the groups in some coherent order.

In this paper, I will present two techniques for producing outlines which separate these logically distinct tasks and deal with them one at a time. These techniques, the box outline and the card outline, can be used both to introduce students to the notions of unity and coherence and to give them practice in manipulating these notions in the various rhetorical patterns of English academic and professional writing. Once mastered, they provide the students with valuable organizational tools for use outside of the ESL classroom as well.

The Scattergram and Box Outline.

The first step in creating the outline is to gather sufficient information about the topic. In the academic setting outside the composition class, this is generally done through observation, experiment, or library research, all of which take time that is better spent in the composition class working on writing problems. This leaves two possibilities: either present the students with the information in some raw, unorganized form or draw it out of their own experience. In order to give the students additional thinking experience, I generally use the latter alternative, although the outlining technique that follows works well however the information is gathered.

To get information out of their heads and onto a piece of paper, students are introduced to a variant of brainstorming called the scattergram (Ross (1961)). In order to direct their thoughts as tightly as possible, the students first write at the top of a piece of paper the topic, audience and purpose of the composition they will be writing. All or part of this information may be given to them the first few times this method is used, but ultimately the students will have to fill in this information independently as well. The students are then instructed to write down everything they can think of connected with the topic, being careful not to mentally edit their thoughts since what appears to be a worthless idea may lead to useful ones. After about ten minutes of this, the students rest a moment and then go back and cross any irrelevant ideas, adding other ideas as they come to mind. It is important to stress that this is an informal aspect

of the composing process: no attention is paid to grammar, style, spelling, or anything else that might slow down the student's thinking. An example of a scattergram appears below:

SCATTERGRAM

Topic: the advantages of having a roommate in college

Audience: College students and those about to enter college

Purpose: Convince the audience to have roommates

Save money on rent and utilities
Save money on food
Save time cooking
Have someone to talk to about problems
Not feel lonely
Save time cleaning
Meet roommate's friends
Have someone to study with
Learn to share responsibilities
Save money on transportation
Have someone to go places with
Make a friend
Learn to share feelings and ideas
Have someone to come home to
Save time on homework if you have the same classes

The remaining tasks in the organization process--classifying, labeling, and ordering--are accomplished individually by using the box-outlining technique that follows. First, students are given a sheet of paper containing six empty boxes. They are then told to take the information from the scattergram and write it in the boxes, taking the ideas one at a time and putting those that seem to go together in the same box. For a two- to three-page composition, each box will eventually be expanded into a paragraph. The boxes are then each given a label that represents the shared element that caused the ideas in them to be grouped together. This label will normally become the controlling idea of the topic sentence when the box is expanded to one another, and finally the information within each box is ordered. The completed box outline appears below.

BOX OUTLINE

Topic: the advantages of having a roommate in college

1	2	4
Save money	Save time	Not feel lonely
1. Save money on rent and utilities 2. Save money on food 3. Save money on transportation	1. Save time cooking 2. Save time cleaning 3. Save time on homework if you have the same classes	2. Have someone to talk to about problems T. Not feel lonely 3. Meet roommate's friends 4. Make a friend 1. Have someone to come home to

3		
Learn about sharing		
2b. Have someone to study with 1. Learn to share responsibilities 3. Learn to share feelings 2a. Learn to share ideas		

A couple of notations in the box outline not previously mentioned should be explained. In Box 4, the abbreviation "T" stands for "topic" and simply notes that the idea following it should be included in the topic sentence. In Box 3

the convention of putting letters after a number ((2a) and (2b)) is used to label ideas that are closely enough related that they may be collapsed into a single compound or complex sentence when the paragraph is written out.

In more detail, the directions for building a box outline from a scattergram are as follows:

1. Write the first idea from the scattergram in the first box.
2. If the second idea seems logically connected with the first, write it in the first box also; otherwise, write it in the next box.
3. Continue with the third, fourth, fifth, etc., ideas.
4. Cross out any idea that doesn't fit the topic, audience, and purpose.
5. Put at least two, and try to put at least three, ideas in each box. Add other ideas if they come.
6. If more than six boxes are used, something is probably wrong. Try to combine the ideas in two or more boxes.
7. Feel free at any time to shift the ideas around.
8. Decide on a classification label for each box and write it at the top.
9. Figure out a logical order for the boxes and number them in the upper left-hand corner.
10. Figure out a logical order for the ideas in each box and number them.

The instructor then checks the outline for content, unity, and coherence, suggesting revisions to the student if necessary. The composition can then be written directly from the box outline.

The instructions above show explicity how the box outline is produced, but it is not necessary for students to religiously follow the numerical order since they have used the technique a couple of times and understand its operation. For example, some students find it helpful to label some or even all of the boxes before putting the information into them if they already have a clear idea of what the major divisions of their composition are going to be. Also, once students have mastered the box-outline technique, it is possible to bypass the separate scattergram step. Instead of

writing the ideas down first on a separate sheet of paper, the students can generate their ideas directly into the boxes, classifying related ideas together as they are written down. Some students seem to find this easier than doing the scattergram first and then taking the additional step of recopying the ideas into the box outline, and it clearly saves some time. Whether this streamlined technique is more effective than the more lengthy one described earlier is a question that each student will have to decide for him/herself after trying both. It is important to keep in mind in general that when used as an organizational tool, the box outline should be adapted to fit the composing style the student feels he or she is most effective and comfortable with.

As was mentioned above, this method can be used to introduce English rhetorical patterns as well as to help students organize compositions after they have become familiar with these patterns. The preceding example was used to introduce a typical cause and effect structure. Given a particular situation, that of having a roommate in college, the effects listed in the boxes are likely to occur. The logical development of the outline proceeds from concrete (money) to abstract (feelings). By working on the box outline as a class exercise at the board or in a writing workshop situation, students are given the feedback which will help them first to construct and then to modify their own rhetorical patterns so that they coincide with those of academic English.

The box outline has several advantages over the standard outline, both as an instrument of teaching and as a general organizational technique. First, it is conceptually much simpler than a standard outline. By separating the tasks of classifying, labeling, and ordering, it allows students to concentrate more fully on each. Furthermore, the boxes provide a graphic representation of the unity of a group of ideas by enclosing them in a physical perimeter. Second, it is more flexible than a standard outline. Editing can be done at each stage as well as at the end. Since the information is already jumbled, students find it more natural to experiment with alternative classifications and orders. Finally students seem to like it better than a standard outline. Filling in the boxes is more of a game than constructing a standard outline. As a novelty, the box outline holds their attention and involves them more completely in the composing process. In addition, they recognize its value as an organizational tool outside the ESL classroom.

There are, admittedly, a couple of disadvantages to the box outline as well. First, it is not designed to accommodate more than two levels of subdivision; however, for a short composition greater detail is rarely necessary. Second, the order of ideas in the finished product is jumbled and therefore difficult in some cases to follow. If necessary, this

problem may be solved simply by having the student write a standard outline based on the box outline for the final version.

The Card Outline.

One additional problem that sometimes arises with the box outline is that it is difficult to use it to experiment with different classification schemes since once the boxes have been filled from the scattergram, students have to cross out an idea and recopy it into another box when they want to shift its classification. Given the limited amount of space available in the boxes, after a few ideas have been shifted around, the boxes are filled with new or crossed out ideas and the students are forced to recopy the current version of their outline onto a new sheet if they want to make additional changes. This problem can be alleviated somewhat if students are using pencil and erasing, but this type of shifting still requires a lot of time and may ultimately yield unreadable copy. An alternative to the box outline, the card outline, solves this problem and allows students the necessary flexibility to experiment.

With the card outline technique, the ideas are originally generated on separate cards or slips of paper. A good size for the cards is 3" x 1.25", which can be obtained by cutting a 3" x 5" note card into quarters. Once the ideas have been written down in the typical scattergram fashion, the students take the cards one by one and lay them out on their desks in much the same way they would if writing onto a box outline. A reasonable amount of space should be left between the groups so that the students will have room to move the cards around; in fact, the more work space the students have, the better. Once the groups have been laid out, the students write the group headings on blank cards and insert them at the top of each group. In the final stage of ordering the items, items within a group can be moved into the appropriate position without too much difficulty. The groups as a whole, however, are much more difficult to move, so I suggest simply numbering the cards with the group headings on them, as is done with the box outline.

Once the outline is laid out, and a student has done all the rearranging he or she feels is necessary, the teacher can come over to the desk and give the student feedback on the outline, suggesting different categorizations, different orderings, adding or deleting items, etc., all of which are much more manageable using this technique than using the box outline. Given sufficient workspace, this technique also allows for more levels of subclassification than the box outline and makes it easy to add cards with examples or

illustrations if a more detailed outline is desired.

The obvious drawback to this technique is that it is messy. The box outline, contained on a single sheet of paper, is obviously more transportable and easier to write an actual composition from. However, when there is a need to preserve a card outline, there are three ways that it can be accomplished. First, it can simply be copied onto a separate sheet of paper in traditional outline form, though this admittedly takes time which could probably be used more effectively on some other task. A second alternative is to tape the cards together using scotch tape and then attach them to another piece of paper. This works well as long as the outlines are not too long (although students can always use multiple sheets of paper) but has the obvious disadvantage of requiring a fair amount of scotch tape for a whole class. The last way is to simply pick up the cards in order and put a rubber band around them. While this is the fastest and easiest method of storing the card outline, it is very awkward to try to write a composition from a stack by pulling the cards off one at a time because the students cannot see the overall "map" of the composition, which may adversely affect their writing of the introduction and their use of transitional expressions. Thus, while the card outline has considerably more flexibility than the box outline, it is less easy to use an actual outline for writing. One possibility for using both in a composition class would be to use the card outline for introducing the principles of unity and coherence in various rhetorical patterns and then to use the box outline for practicing these with an eye toward actually writing compositions from the outlines. The card outline, because of its greater flexibility, is a technique students could be encouraged to use at home where time and workspace are less of a factor, while the box outline could be used as a pre-writing technique for in-class compositions and even essay examination questions.

In this paper, I have presented two new techniques for teachers to use in the teaching of composition organization to ESL students. The techniques, the box outline and the card outline, give students a means of performing the tasks of gathering information, classifying it, labeling the classes, and ordering the classes and the information within them independently, rather than performing these tasks simultaneously as in the traditional outlining method. Once the students have understood the basic principles of unity and coherence with respect to the patterns of logical development for English academic and professional writing, the writing itself and learning the appropriate use of transitional expressions and other rhetorical devices for linking the ideas together smoothly becomes a much simpler task.

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